



Communicating with Schools about Homework Club Students

Introduction

For a community run homework club, communication with a student's school is a vital way of ensuring any assistance given to a student is appropriate for their educational needs. It is crucial that signed permission from the student's parents is obtained prior to liaising with a school about a student attending a homework club. Most homework clubs have a section on their registration form that covers this. (See <http://cmy.net.au/homework-club-resources> for forms that obtain parental permission).

Discussions about a student's educational progress should be treated with the utmost confidentiality and privacy. It is appropriate for the coordinator to discuss the educational needs and factors affecting a student's progress with a tutor(s) working directly with the student. It is not appropriate, however, to discuss the student's progress with people inside or outside the homework club generally or with tutors not directly involved with the student's tuition. Care also needs to be exercised with any written documentation on a student's progress and extra assistance they may require. This information should only be seen by those directly involved and stored in a secure place. You should make tutors aware of your organisation's expectations in relation to confidentiality and privacy throughout your program's orientation process.

Schools and community agencies are very busy services so any system set up for liaison about a student's program should be as time efficient as possible for all parties. Homework clubs that have a high number of students attending their service from several schools will have time and resource difficulties in communicating with schools. In cases like this, it is probably best for homework clubs to focus on liaising with schools attended by the students displaying the most difficulties with their educational progress.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.

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Making contact with the school

1. Email the school to introduce yourself. Introduce yourself and your service, explaining the purpose of your contact and who you are hoping to talk to (if you know). It is rare to find individual teachers' email addresses on a school website, therefore this introductory email will be sent to the general school's or Principal's email address. Remember the school and Principal may receive a high number of emails daily so ensure that your email is to the point.
2. Identify a key contact person for discussions on a student's progress. Find out from the student and/or their family which teachers they are mainly involved with at the school. At a primary school level this is most likely to be their classroom teacher. At a secondary school level you could seek to liaise with the student's homeroom teacher who will see the student daily and may even assist in getting contact with parents. As well the ESL teacher (if the school has one), Year level coordinator, School Welfare Coordinator or another teacher the student identifies may be beneficial contacts. It may be important at the Secondary level to also consider specific subject teachers; particularly if this is an area with which a student is having difficulties, such as Chemistry or Maths.
3. Be clear about your purpose when making phone contact. Be aware that most school staff do not have direct phone lines. Your calls will be answered by office staff who play a vital role in linking the "outside world" with school staff and handle a wide variety of requests daily. If you need to speak to school staff, ask when would be the most convenient time for you to ring again, it may be: before school; during the lunch break; or when the teacher has a couple of sessions of time release from teaching during the week.
4. Try to arrange meetings with teacher to take place at the school. Meeting at the school also gives you the opportunity to learn more about the workings of the school and may be more convenient for them due to their commitments.
5. Be aware of staff changes. Staff and teachers' roles change, a new liaison person may need to be found each year. Ideally, the teacher you have been communicating with in the previous year will be able to assist you in this process.
6. Agree on keeping in contact. Once you have identified a contact person, discuss which will be the best methods and times to maintain contact in relation to the student(s). It may work best to formalise the process and have a meeting once a term.
7. Keep Up to date. The vast majority of schools have a regular newsletter which is available in hard and soft copy. It may be possible to be included on the emailing list for school newsletters so that you receive each issue and be kept up to date on school matters. This information will enhance your work with students from that school and enable you to discuss with students what is happening at school as well as key deadlines and encourage them to participate in activities offered by the school community.
8. Maintain the relationship. Communication will improve with the development of a "relationship" between the homework club and the school. Make every effort to be part of school events even if it is unrelated to the homework club so staff and students become more familiar and trusting of you and the organisation that you work for.

Communicating about students

9. Agree student priorities. The aim of communicating with a school is to gain clear information on a student's main priorities and the best strategies and activities for addressing these in the homework club context.
10. Student reports. You may be able to obtain a copy of the student's report (these come

out at the end of terms 2 and 4) either through the student, parents or the school. This will help you to gain an overview of the student's progress and areas in which they may be having difficulties. Particularly important sections on both the primary and secondary school report cards for homework clubs are: "Areas for improving/future learning" and "What you can do at home to help student X progress". Both these sections will give homework clubs an idea to which areas of the curriculum the student needs to pay more attention. For more information on report cards see: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/studentreports/samples/default.htm#1>

11. Learning plans. Some schools have individual learning plans for each student, so if you can obtain a copy of this plan it will give you information on what work the student is currently doing.
12. Parent teacher interviews. If the student, their parents and the school are comfortable with the idea, the coordinator could attend the student's parent teacher interviews. This would give you the opportunity to hear first hand their progress in each subject. Be sensitive to the fact that parent-teacher interviews are generally time-limited so the parent's and student's questions in this situation should be given absolute priority.
13. Use the School/OSHLSP communication form as a tool for promoting communication with the school. Prior to using the form make sure the teacher(s) are aware of it and are given the opportunity to give feedback on the design/wording for this document before actual implementation. The school need to be comfortable working with such a form. This form may be particularly useful for students with homework they are finding too difficult to complete. This could be used as a communication tool with the school indicating which work the student found difficult to complete and what alternative work they may have done.